CULTIVATING GRADUATE WRITING GROUPS AS COMMUNITIES OF PRACTICE: A CALL TO ACTION FOR THE WRITING CENTER

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Abstract

According to the Council of Graduate Schools, the attrition rate for graduate students is high and becomes higher when looking at underrepresented populations inside the academy. One particular need that has been identified is that of writing support for doctoral students (Kamler and Thomson xi; Mullen 117; Paltridge and Starfield 53). This article builds on this call by giving attention to writing support for graduate students in the form of doctoral writing groups, specifically facilitated by writing centers. These graduate student-writing groups are comprised of graduate students, who share their writing and give feedback on writing in-person during regular group meetings. As such, these graduate writing groups function as a community of practice through which we trace the struggles, benefits, and implications of writing groups for ameliorating access and equity issues in graduate writing support. This article focuses on experiences of the authors' own writing group, in which they have participated throughout their doctoral education. We employ an inductive, multi-narrative approach to examine the underlying needs of graduate student writers and we suggest facilitating a writing group as a way to meet those needs. As such, this project sheds new light on the successes and struggles of a graduate student writing group and how writing centers can provide support for these groups. As a type of "third space," operating apart from faculty purview, the writing center is an ideal place to formalize, organize, and invigorate graduate writing communities by initiating and hosting graduate writing groups.

Much discussion has taken place on the role of writing centers and writing groups in higher education for faculty (Page-Adams, et al. 403; Aitchison "Learning Together to Publish" 83, "Writing Groups for Doctoral Education" 914; and Geller 9); however, there remains little literature from the lived experience of doctoral students involved in any such writing groups (D. Maher et al. 263). Scholars call for more attention to graduate education, particularly writing support for doctoral students (Kamler and Thomson 8; Mullen 118; Paltridge and Starfield 53). As such, writing studies scholars have ignited an interest in graduate writing groups (Geller 16; Garcia, Eum, and Watt 265; Fraser and Little 75). The authors of this article contribute to this line of research as they were part of a student-created and student-run doctoral writing group developed to supplement the existing forms of writing support provided to graduate students. This research departs from previous interdisciplinary research, in that it explores a disciplinary writing group where graduate students from related disciplines come together to read and respond to writing as disciplinary professionals/experts. This article also departs from the work above in that it strictly considers forming graduate writing groups as a response to the isolation experienced in graduate school and it suggests that writing centers can serve an integral role in helping graduate students build these communities of practice.

As some of the founding members of this group, we are sharing our experiences to benefit other graduate students and to provide insight into how writing centers could better assist students in the writing process. In response to Jackie Grutsch McKinney's *Peripheral Visions for Writing Centers*, we argue that the practice of de-centering the writing center ought to include discipline-specific, graduate student writing groups and we provide some specific suggestions as to how writing centers can better work with graduate students (8).

This call to writing centers is expressly important because research has shown that insufficient attention is given to doctoral writing, yet graduate students, particularly in the humanities and social sciences, are expected to engage in substantial writing throughout their programs (Rose and McClafferty 27; "Learning Together to Publish" 95; Mullen 118; Kamler and Thomson xi). As Damien Maher et al. note, universities help students develop their research skills, yet fail when it comes to initiating them into written disciplinary literacies (264). This omission, coupled with many universities' failure to provide academic writing guidance at the graduate level, leaves students ill-prepared to engage with their intellectual communities, especially since establishing a publishing record is needed to get or keep an academic position (Mullen 120). The lack of attention given to the process of writing not only continues to obfuscate the writing process, but presents challenges to those seeking writing support (Ferguson 286).

Help acquiring the conventions of graduate writing can normally be found by seeking out faculty assistance, taking writing courses, or utilizing campus writing centers. However, each of these options is not

without problems. Although faculty are often helpful, their time is limited, some of them struggle with their own writing, and their expectations for writing in the classroom differs from publication. Additionally, we have found throughout most of our coursework, faculty rarely provide opportunities for graduate students to share written work in their courses. When we have shared, it has been via end-of-semester presentations, leaving relatively limited time to engage our peers regarding each other's work. While writing for publication courses have been extremely beneficial for some students, in our own programs they were rare.

Apart from the graduate classroom, we recognize the importance of writing centers in helping graduate students improve their writing. In our own experience, serving as tutors or clients in writing centers, we recognize the value of graduate-serving writing centers. Our own writing center provides free consultations for graduate and undergraduate students. Through this service, assistance was provided for graduate students to assist with grants, publications, research proposals, reports, and application materials. However, there were restrictions on what could be reasonably achieved in the writing center. Often the appointment times are short, the staff may change by semester or year, and writing consultants outside the client's field may not be an ideal match. While the authors strongly advocate for writing centers, we also suggest there are other ways writing centers can further assist graduate students, by specifically forming self-directed writing groups.

This essay examines how self-directed graduate writing groups can serve as communities of practice that offer benefits to members well beyond improving writing. In the sections that follow, we provide our own experiences to illustrate how our writing group constitutes a community of practice by helping us become part of an intellectual community, serve as disciplinary and emotional support, develop trust and respect in members, and re-contextualize the writing process from an individual act to a socially embedded scholarly practice (Wenger 2). In the end, these practices can inform writing center administrators aiming to facilitate advanced graduate writing.

Maud May Babcock Doctoral Writing Society

In the spring of 2013, an invitation went out from one of our peers inquiring about interest in creating a writing group. Ultimately, nine female students responded to the inquiry and formed the Maud May Babcock Doctoral Writing Society, identifying ourselves with our university's first female professor in order to bring attention to women's contributions to our institution. No men accepted the invitation or inquired about the writing group. The group was made up of members ranging from more traditionally-aged students in their twenties to returning students in their forties, full-and part-time students, and first-generation students from the Communication Department and Rhetoric and Writing Studies Department.

In an attempt to break through this isolation and to learn more about writing, we forged a community of practice; our identity was based on a common domain of interest, we engaged in joint activities such as peer reviewing and practicing presentations that allowed us to build relationships and learn from each other, and we shared our writing practice and experiences of being graduate students (Geller et al. 7; Wenger 5). This also provided scholarly benefits in the form of job talks, job document reviews, and preparing to become good colleagues. In establishing this community, one of the most important things we did early on was to agree upon ground rules. First, we decided to limit the membership to eight-to-ten students. This was a manageable number to allow everyone to participate and ensure there would always be enough members present during meetings to provide feedback. We met twice monthly for two hours that included peer review, discussion, and other academic endeavors. Meeting times were negotiated around members' schedules, ensuring that each member received peer reviews at least once per semester. While there was no specific attendance policy, it became a common expectation that if a member was unable to attend, she notified the group and still provided written reviews to the author. We also wanted to keep membership closely aligned to our discipline while accommodating a variety of research topics.

As the initial group was all women, we decided to remain an all-female society in order to freely discuss gender issues inside scholarship, our disciplines, and academic institutions. As noted above, our writing group was not intentionally designed as a women-only group, yet only women responded to the initial email query asking for interested participants. Writing groups, in general, are frequently all female, which is further supported by writing studies research. As Virginia Fajt, et al. found, women take advantage of "faculty professional development activities [like writing groups] far more frequently and in greater numbers than do their male colleagues" (172). Brian Baldi, et al. echo Fajt et al. by explaining that in the seven structured writing retreats she studied, "a majority or all of the participants were women" (40). As members of an all-female writing group, we found the gender composition of our writing group important

because it was a defining characteristic that we all shared. Furthermore, our experience in writing groups gave us space to counter our gender socialization and develop academic identities imbued with authority. More specifically, we found that the informal training built into writing groups helps female graduate students counter their gender socialization, as they try on academic personas as *experts* of their writing and as peer mentors to graduate students earlier in their programs. The closeness experienced in these writing groups also allows women to break through the isolation that often characterizes most students' experience in graduate school.

While gender socialization maybe the reason women seek out writing groups, it may also be the reason men are underrepresented in writing groups. By joining a writing group, one is conceding that they may need help with their writing and that they will have to humbly share ideas in a collaborative atmosphere. In effect, males joining a writing group, or seeking out any faculty development opportunities, are confronting masculine gender socialization by admitting that they are not the "ideal" of a reclusive, independent writer capable of success without help. As a writing group comprising only women, an unexpected benefit was a feeling of breaking through the isolation often experienced when facing down the daunting conventions of an academic institution on one's own.

Problems in Graduate Education:

Isolation

Attrition rates for graduate students are inordinately high with only 56.6% completing degrees within ten years (Council of Graduate Schools). These numbers range greatly from completion rates of less than 50% in the Humanities (the home college of our writing members) to 63.6% in Engineering. The same study found that women doctoral graduates outnumber men in seven out of eleven identified graduate fields and those often with the heaviest writing requirements. Three primary reasons are given for students dropping out: predisposing characteristics, critical events in students' lives, and institutional factors (Stoessel, Ihme, Barbarino, Fisseler and Stürmer 229). As previously mentioned, additional reasons for this attrition include feeling isolated and not receiving explicit instruction on advanced academic literacies (Aronson and Swanson 165; Casanave and Vandrick; Gere 3; Aitchison "Learning Together to Publish" 86; Rose and McClaffery 28). Underrepresented populations often face compounding challenges to completing graduate degrees, such as impostor syndrome and infantilization (Aronson and Swanson 157; Maher, Fallucca and Halasz 193).

Isolation in graduate school is often attributed to the competitive nature of departments or the design of degree programs expecting students to seclude themselves in order to complete lengthy writing and research projects. Early in their graduate careers, students note that intradepartmental competition leads them to self-isolation to protect their ideas or withhold peer support (Aronson and Swanson 165). Moreover, Therese Ferguson found that this isolation sparks a range of negative emotions that hinder writing, including self-doubt, fear, anxiety, insecurity and lack of motivation (287). Our experiences fall in line with this characterization: it is isolating as one progresses in the program, making it difficult to manage emotions that could lead to attrition. We soon realized we craved social and emotional support in addition to writing support. Not only were we all experiencing isolation and doubt but we were also struggling to understand how to be good scholars and academic peers.

Ironically, we were not alone in feeling isolated. Scholars of genre and literacy studies find that "institutions, like universities, constrain and enable the writing practices of the individuals who are affiliated with them" (Salem and Follett 54). One of the ways institutions constrain writing practices is through isolation and separation, as many graduate students and faculty working in universities report feeling secluded from others (Fraser and Little 75). Early on in our graduate careers, we felt isolated because the only spaces in which we interacted were in competitive, occasionally hostile seminar rooms, under the faculty's guidance and frequently judgmental purview. Although we were considered "students" in these spaces, the graduate seminar room is often not the space to *act* as a student, as one questions and reveals their ignorance at the price of public shaming. And as advanced graduate students, we were isolated by space—as we no longer had the classroom community to fall back on—and time, due to the intense studying required for qualifying exams or drafting dissertations.

Lack of Explicit Instruction

Another way that institutions often exacerbate graduate students' feelings of isolation is by encouraging writing instruction primarily through the use of writing centers. A one-hour meeting with a tutor, who may or may not be familiar with the norms of one's discipline, does not provide ample opportunities for the type of social support that graduate students may crave. Additionally, a student can visit the writing center on multiple occasions and perhaps see a different tutor every time, preventing the

kind of close interpersonal relationships that might happen within a writing group. While these forms of writing instruction are necessary in many cases, they are not the only kind of support that graduate students need in order to be successful.

Furthermore, we felt isolated from the learning process and often struggled with becoming socialized into the tacit expectations and academic literacies of our disciplines ("Writing Groups for Doctoral Education" 907). Arguably, one of the primary functions of graduate education is to socialize students into active members of a specific discipline vis-à-vis nuanced and complex research, writing, teaching, and service expectations. As Susan K. Gardner and Pilar Mendoza articulate in *Becoming a Scholar: Socialization and Development in Doctoral Education*,

> Socialization, generally defined, is the process through which an individual learns to adopt the values, skills, attitudes, norms, and knowledge needed for membership in a given society, group, or organization. (19)

In particular, disciplinary socialization as a doctoral student is the process of learning the unspoken conventions and practices to become an academic in a specific discipline, such as the minutiae of acceptable writing techniques and the preferred methods of making and defending credible knowledge claims. However, faculty often assumed we already had certain types of disciplinary knowledge and advanced writing skills, which is not always the case with graduate students from diverse socioeconomic and educational backgrounds (Fraser and Littler 75-85). In practice, this assumption about our writing skills meant that we were rarely asked to submit drafts and were not given lessons focused on the disciplinary quirks, expectations, and implicit rules of academic writing—sometimes we were not even given feedback on final drafts apart from a course letter grade or a simple "no."

As is evident from our experience, explicit instruction seldom occurs from professors to graduate students. Graduate students are frequently tasked with building their own academic and professional identity, which does not always lead to success. Writing studies scholars recognize the need for explicit teaching of academic writing in the graduate curriculum, arguing that even though doctoral students are considered highly literate and not in need of writing instruction, such is not necessarily the case, since they must now prove themselves in a new kind of scholarly literacy (Rose and McClafferty 28; Aitchison "Learning Together to Publish" 87). The struggle to become disciplinary socialized is a stressful one, but writing groups can be a forum in which to safely discuss one's difficulties and exchange knowledge with peers about strategies for enacting such socialization.

As such, writing groups, for both faculty and graduate students, are heralded by writing studies scholars as "an explicit antidote to the isolationism in academic life surrounding writing" (Herald 2005; Grant 2006; cited in Fraser and Little 85). A writing group is explicitly an antidote to isolation as it functions as a coming together of minds to facilitate the "exchange of ideas and opportunities" as well as provides "support and encouragement" for various intellectual projects (Geller 9; Gray and et al. 98). For those nascent to the discipline, writing groups take on an even higher level of importance as they are a space for graduate students to cultivate an academic identity, wherein they *try on* the identity of disciplinary expert and peer mentor. In fact, peer mentoring "is often cited as one of the primary benefits of graduate writing groups" (Garcia et al. 260-4). It seems that by surrounding themselves with others who are actively learning to assert themselves as disciplinary experts, members of the writing group start to identify as disciplinary experts, researchers and writers, too (Banks and Flinchbaugh 237). Moreover, for female graduate students, experiencing oneself as a disciplinary expert is expressly important because we are often haunted by the impostor syndrome: "impostors who cannot actually do the work being asked for and who do not belong" (Garcia et al. 265). As an antidote, writing groups allow graduate students the opportunity to break through this isolationism, cultivate academic identities, and silence nagging and unfounded doubts about intellectual ability.

Characteristics of Productive Writing Groups

Writing center research notes characteristics that mark writing groups as productive communities of practice: a pervading sense of trust, respect for other members, admiration and generosity when interacting with others and their scholarship, a non-competitive atmosphere of support, and members with the same disciplinary expertise. Although these characteristics are all important in cultivating a productive writing group, trust emerged as the most significant, overarching characteristic in the scholarship (Gere 3; Aitchison "Learning Together to Publish 95;" Maher, Fallucca and Halasz 195). In our group, this trust required members to respect the vulnerability of those who share writings in-progress. Even if the work is in its final form, this trust assumes that members will not critique or share their intellectual work with others outside of the group. As such, this trust created a safe space where students can reveal their insecurities about

writing and honestly seek help (Aitchison "Learning Together to Publish" 69). As one of our group members observed, "I've shared the crappiest drafts with my writing group when I was stuck on an idea, and received incredibly generous and open feedback. I have complete confidence because we all trust each other with our work."

This trust cultivated in our writing group extended into other, more personal spaces as members sought advice on all matters inside and outside academia. Michelle Maher et al. share our experience with graduate writing groups as spaces to solve problems both personal and intellectual, finding the "opportunity to speak frankly about [their] concerns and hear them echoed by respected peers has been transformative" (259). Another writing group member said, "When I was preparing for comprehensive exams, I turned to the group's more advanced students. It was so good to hear about surviving exams from my peers rather than my advisor and committee, and made me feel like I could tackle them, too." Here, trust allowed for frankness to pierce through isolation and any insecurity graduate students have about their writing or their experience in the program.

Furthermore, the meeting space where the writing group gathered is outside the confines of the traditional classroom and the purview of faculty. As such, it became a place where power dynamics are more equalized and trust prevails. We met in a former interaction/observation lab that is tucked into a secluded corner of a building on campus, equipped with tables, chairs, couches and a chalkboard. Although our meeting space was in this former observation lab, we argue that writing centers could facilitate this space to host meetings for graduate writing groups, as the writing center is also outside of the traditional classroom and apart from the purview of the faculty. Meeting in a type of third space allows for diffuse power relationships between members in order to promote a non-competitive environment where members may compete for the same fellowships, funding, awards and honors, yet continue to support each other and not sabotage one another's efforts. Equalizing these dynamics coupled with trust means that there is more attention to learning as a process and to writing as a craft. According to Linda S. Bergman, trust allows for graduate students to craft a "protected space" where "trickster moments' (moments when ...unexpected learning) [can] occur" (534). Beyond posturing and competitiveness, these "moments" allow for a kind of trickster learning that supports innovative research in generative, extracurricular spaces (Geller et al. 16). Without a sense of trust, Anne Ruggles Gere notes that writing groups risk diminished performance and commitment from all their members (104).

In addition, trust facilitates the development of another characteristic that makes writing groups successful—respect for members. In our writing group, this respect was ingrained inside the practice of giving constructive feedback on written work. Claire Aitchison notes that developing respect through feedback is a characteristic of most writing groups:

> these groups operate on the principle of 'mutuality' and 'community' [so] group members invest considerable energy in reviewing others' writing, knowing their efforts will be returned when they submit their writing for peer review." ("Writing Groups for Doctoral Education" 913)

The respect circulating in this space authorizes students to cultivate their own "research voice" in an intellectual setting—both for the student offering feedback and for the student who accepts the feedback and/or chooses to defend their written position. This experience of embodying academic authority is one that members take with them into other spaces where power dynamics are more hierarchical.

Related to trust are admiration for fellow members and willingness to share one's time and resources generously. As the group developed and members moved into advanced stages of candidacy, we found that members cultivate a sense of admiration for one another and the work they have achieved together. Our group celebrated as our peers achieved important milestones and accolades, including job offers, fellowships, entrance into honors seminars, and publications. Michelle Maher et al. further bolster our characterization of writing groups by describing them as intellectual communities with a shared purpose that is "diverse, multigenerational, flexible, respectful and *generous*" (194; our italics). Our writing group mirrored this characterization, especially the emphasis on generosity, as we sacrificed time, offered extensive feedback and shared meals together. In a real way, our writing group developed beyond a community of practice to a community of friends and scholars.

Benefits of Community in Writing Groups

This section draws heavily on our experiences as members of a doctoral writing group to suggest several benefits reaped by members, specifically: motivation, intellectual and emotional support, continuity of experience, the chance to learn from writers with diverse strengths, and peer mentoring. As Sarah Moore rightly observes,

> People writing as part of a community of writers are more likely to learn faster about the

> conventions and challenges of writing, to support each other at times of blockage, and to demystify the process of writing by sharing each others' successes and failures. (Moore 334; cited in Schendel, et al. 145)

These scholarly benefits of building community in writing groups are powerful academic tools.

Staying motivated despite the stresses of graduate school is a major struggle for many students. Research suggests that writing groups can increase students' motivation; Deborah Page-Adams et al. note that writing group members reported increased quality and quantity of scholarly writing and higher motivation (406). This rings true with our experience; knowing that it is your turn to receive feedback from respected peers is powerful motivation to write and/or revise a piece of work in time for the group to read it. As one member explains,

> When we chose which week we'd like to receive feedback, I purposely asked for times that forced me to write well before the deadline I'm working toward, whether it's the end of the semester or for something else. The group has almost cured me of my writing procrastination!

Beyond the accountability that a writing group provides, being a part of a social writing community makes writing seem invigorating and enjoyable rather than isolating and dreadful.

Hand-in-hand with the motivation to produce quality writing, we find a tremendous fount of intellectual and emotional support in our writing group. Group members reap scholarly benefits of the writing community when we challenged one another on theoretical concepts, made straightforward comments about organization or foundational principles, and suggested improvements that ultimately pushed us all forward as writers and reviewers. Because we had group members at various stages in their education, we were also able to benefit from one another's experience by suggesting references or addressing unclear arguments.

As we are all socialized into our disciplines, the writing group offers chances to immediately put our boots on the ground. Sherrie Gradin, et al. find graduate writing groups helpful in "becoming a colleague in one's field and entering into the discourse communities of the discipline with authority." Writing groups give students a place to learn "how to scholar," to become experts in their disciplinary field, in the most pragmatic, hands-on way. This includes the opportunity to give regular, thorough feedback and receive criticism on our own writing, organize panels, coauthor articles, and set up workshops with visiting scholars. Another significant benefit to participating in a writing group is the opportunity for peer mentorship. Our writing group served as an informal, intergenerational network between students at a more advanced stage of doctoral candidacy and newer students to help initiate them into the department, the discipline, and the academy.

We also benefited from the chance to learn from each others' strengths. Within our group, members were variously skilled in theory, graceful prose, asking probing questions, organizational strategies, and fine-tuning essays. Receiving feedback from writers with so many different points of expertise is invaluable. In addition to strengthening our papers, it allowed us to practice writing for audiences with different expectations, thereby furthering our socialization into our discipline. This disciplinary socialization was facilitated by inviting members who were all from related disciplines and who were learning to become experts within their fields (Anson; Clark-Oates and Cahill). Finally, not only did our writing group prepare us to get jobs within or outside academia, it prepared us to be good colleagues. Several of the members have continued to review for each other, write together, help make networking connections, and prepare job documents. While there were many successes within our group, to pretend it was without challenges would be an oversight.

Limitations of Our Writing Group

This section discusses some of the challenges we encountered as we developed our writing group. One of the most difficult challenges was recruiting and maintaining active new members. As members of the initial group graduated, it was difficult to recruit new members and to develop the level of trust and comfort with the vulnerability of sharing works in progress that we had established with prior members. A few promising new recruits did not integrate into the writing group as hoped, and their participation was short-lived for a semester or less. Some members were less dedicated and participated only when their work was being evaluated. There were unsuccessful meetings that drifted off-topic and resulted in a member's work not getting evaluated or having limited review. After the founders of the group began to graduate, the remaining members struggled to thrive with reduced membership and participation, although there were dedicated members trying to find success with the group.

As previously discussed, while there were definite advantages of an all female group, the opportunity to have male members may have been beneficial as well. It could have provided the chance to engage in the

gendered differences in dialogue and critique, facilitate conversations about gender differences in the discipline, and potentially allow women the chance to address the gender disparity within the research. Likewise, while drawing membership from a common discipline was advantageous in terms of accelerating disciplinary socialization and sharing foundational theoretical knowledge, the group may have benefitted from the fresh perspectives that disciplinary outsiders could have shared. Finally, while our group was fortunate to have easy access to an ideal meeting space within one of our departments, the logistics of arranging schedules was a negotiation each semester, and on occasion it was impossible to accommodate everyone's coursework, teaching, outside work, or familial obligations. This would usually result in one member taking a brief hiatus for a semester so that the rest of the group could carry on with meetings as usual, and then rejoining once schedules realigned.

While some of these challenges may be endemic to the realities of doctoral education, others may be resolvable with careful guidance from a writing center administrator more familiar with navigating these territories. It is through these challenges, where students and the writing centers can come together to offer space and opportunity for meaningful change.

How Writing Centers Can Support Graduate Student Writing Groups

This essay emphasizes the importance of developing graduate writing skills and the benefits of writing groups in facilitating this goal. But the question remains, how can writing centers utilize our experiences to improve writing support for graduate students? What follows are ways of answering McKinney's call to de-center the writing center and facilitate other forms of writing support, including graduate student writing groups (90). In our own experiences working at and utilizing writing centers, we have found that they are an important asset to students. As mentioned previously, the types of services that writing centers provide graduate students are often limited by issues of time, frequency and familiarity with the various fields from which clients come. As such, we propose that writing centers partner with graduate students (and potentially departments) to help facilitate and support disciplinary-specific writing groups.

We propose that writing centers can do this by encouraging frequent clients to develop and use writing groups, working with academic units to support writing groups, and serving as facilitators and mentors for emerging writing groups. Writing centers can support graduate writing by creating connections throughout campus to broaden the recognition that writing is a social practice. Although writing as a social practice is something that writing centers stress, because help provided in the writing center is one-on-one and does not frequently involve a group, this social element of writing is not often conveyed to students. As such, writing centers could begin by helping "graduate" frequent visitors into writing groups by connecting students to others with similar research or interests in the same field.

Although writing centers serve students from across the university, it is important that the "graduated" students making up the writing groups come from similar programs. For example, our group may have diverged based on stage of candidature and chosen methodology, yet we made a deliberate attempt to keep our membership within disciplines that are closely related. We argue that crafting writing groups with members from similar disciplines is essential to receiving feedback that will push graduate student writing and integrate students into the conventions of their discipline. As Chris Anson notes, no practices to improve a piece of writing

> will be more effective than having other disciplinary professionals read and respond to it. One solution to this problem is to create writing groups within departments or generalized disciplinary areas that produce closely allied kinds of scholarship. (28)

This is not to discount writing feedback from members outside of one's academic specialty—this feedback remains helpful. Yet, we agree with Anson; particularly at the doctoral level, this feedback is not *as* helpful in cultivating one's "disciplinary discourses or their heteroglossic histories" (Bazerman 243, quoted in Anson 28). According to Angela Clark-Oates and Lisa Cahill, feedback from disciplinary professionals teaches one to become an "insider" into an academic community by trading in the "codes used by the community and the customs and conventions in play" (112), advancing students' disciplinary socialization. Our disciplinary-centric writing group is in-line with Anson and Clark-Oates and Cahill's recommendation that writing feedback is most helpful from disciplinary experts (a recommendation strictly in tension with the multidisciplinary graduate writing groups promoted by Elena Marie-Atkins Garcia et al. and Gertrude Fraser and Deandra Little). As such, our disciplinary similarity allows us to deepen our knowledge of our field's conventions and understand how arguments are framed from different perspectives inside the same discipline.

Since the disciplinary elements of writing groups are so crucial, writing centers can promote writing as a social practice by working more closely with academic units to develop writing groups. Writing groups rectify many issues with graduate education, expressly as an antidote to isolation and socializing students into their disciplines. Key personnel in writing centers can meet with administrators and faculty to promote more student writing groups by educating these campus leaders about the importance of graduate writing support to enhance students' progress towards doctoral completion. For example, advisors could encourage students to join writing groups based on their needs for all the reasons we discussed above. By providing faculty, and especially graduate student advisors with best practices, writing centers can help illuminate the challenges graduate students face as new scholars and highlight writing group success stories.

Of course, the direct role of writing center staff in helping graduate students develop their writing is critical. Writing center staff can partner with academic departments to ensure graduate students are getting explicit instruction in the writing conventions of their respective fields. Additionally, writing center staff and administrators can serve as mentors to facilitate new writing groups, which can include providing interested students with tips on organizing and direction on how to be good peer reviewers. But we advise this should be a limited role in getting groups started; writing center staff should not function as ongoing facilitators. Graduate students need to feel a sense of ownership and trust in order to sustain a successful writing group. Our own group emerged as many of us realized our needs relating to writing and becoming scholars. We recognize this is somewhat unusual, as the literature suggests many writing groups are formed with help from faculty or writing center staff. As such, we strongly encourage writing centers to continue leading the development of university support for writing groups.

In the end, graduate students require different support than the one-off tutoring that often happens in the writing center and in faculty-student interactions. Furthermore, implementing these practices extends the impact of writing centers by tailoring their support to the needs of graduate students by developing writing groups where innovative research and psychological support thrive. Academic units and graduate advisers must recognize students' need for writing support beginning with the suggestions provided above. Graduate writing groups not only develop better writers but also socialize us into broader communities of practice within the academy.

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